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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: KURDS: PKK IS PRETEXT FOR DEEPER TURKISH AIMS

Classified By: Classified By Jess Bailly, Regional Coordinator for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message.

SUMMARY

1. (S) Conversations with senior Kurdish leaders indicate that they view Turkey's recent public statements and military action against the PKK as a pretext to forward Turkey's "true" strategic goals of undermining the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), delaying a referendum vote on Article 140, and creating fissures between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). They point to the disrespectful treatment of Kurdish delegates to recent talks in Ankara, the KRG's continued willingness to engage in talks, public statements labeling PKK actions "illegal," ceasefire pronouncements, and a new KRG-inter-ministerial security committee as evidence that the Kurds are serious about finding a solution to the PKK issue. KRG officials see a critical role for the United States in any resolution scenario, but fear the possibility the U.S. would "sacrifice the Kurds" to broader regional interests. In order to get the KRG to engage seriously in any resolution effort and to build trust that Turkey has no inherent anti-Kurdish agenda, a Turkish willingness to engage with the KRG as a constitutionally-empowered entity and a statement indicating Turkey's respect of Iraq's constitutional arrangements would go a long way.

2. (C) The following report crystallizes recent conversations RRT Erbil staff has had with KRG officials listed below, together with official public statements and public media commentary. Officials include: Falah Bakir, KRG Director of Foreign Relations; Fuad Hussein, President Barzani's Chief of Staff; Kemal Kerkuki, Deputy Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly; Salahuddin Bahaaddin, Kurdistan Islamic Union General Secretary; KRG Minister of State for Peshmerga, Jafar Mustafa Ali (PUK); and MG Aziz Weysi, head of the Peshmerga Zervani (KDP Intelligence).

TURKISH FEAR AND LOATHING DRIVES PKK HUNT

3. (S) Public and private Kurdish reactions to the recent increased tensions with Turkey over the PKK reveal broad themes and concerns that focus on the manifest mistrust and ill-will between the Kurds and Turkey. Seemingly no one in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and few average Kurds believe that recent Turkish actions are fundamentally about eliminating the PKK's ability to strike from northern Iraq. Senior Kurdish political and security officials have privately shared their belief that the PKK is simply a convenient, high-profile pretext for Turkey's aim to undermine and destabilize the KRG. Public commentary and editorials have made similar claims. They point to "unacceptable insults" leveled by the Turkish military via

the press against KRG President Massoud Barzani, the recent talks in Ankara at which KRG leaders were treated disrespectfully, and Turkey's purported "terrorist list," which includes senior Kurdish political figures including President Barzani's son and Iraqi Council of Representatives member Mahmoud Othman. This is all evidence, Kurdish leaders claim, that exposes Turkey's cynicism and lack of good faith toward real resolution of the PKK problem and lays bare Ankara's fear and mistrust of a prosperous, secure, autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

DELAYING ARTICLE 140 POSSIBLE MOTIVE

14. (S) Kurds also liberally point to Article 140 as a probable motive for Turkey's growing calls for military action against the PKK. Many believe that the GOT's real interest lies in delaying the scheduled referendum on the status of Kirkuk until such time as a more favorable advantage can be gained for Turkey's interests. The KRG, for its part, has responded by working to shore up support among Kirkuk's Arabs to counter any Turkish incursion. Additionally, some in the Kurdish political class believe that the Turkish government's potshots against President Barzani in the Turkish press are an attempt to check the power of Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) vis a vis Iraqi President Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) -- possibly in an attempt to keep the KRG fractured, off-balance, and ineffective.

USG KEY TO ANY RESOLUTION

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15. (S) Many in the Kurdish political and security leadership class believe the United States is the only effective broker to push a resolution. The KRG is concerned about perceived USG impatience with its position, but still sees the United States as critical in any resolution scenario. Some have asked whether the United States would "sacrifice the Kurds" to broader strategic interests as they feel was done in the Algiers Accords of 1975.

WHAT THE KURDS BELIEVE THEY'RE DOING RIGHT

16. (S) Despite being stung by the recent slights in Ankara, the Kurdish leadership has signaled that it is still prepared to engage diplomatically on the PKK issue but argues that its resources are limited. Kurdish leaders have stressed that any Kurd-on-Kurd violence would not be part of any solution -- dismissing any KRG military option against the PKK. Aside from the inability (and unwillingness) of Peshmerga forces to rout the PKK from their mountain redoubts, KRG officials are also quick to remind people that the PKK continues to be viewed by Kurds as the protector of millions of ethnic Kurds in Turkey. While KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani and President Barzani have publicly called PKK attacks on the Turkish military and emplacements on the border "illegal," there is little likelihood that any KRG leader will tag the PKK as terrorists. Kurdish officials have distanced themselves by insisting that the conflict is between the PKK and Turkey; have called for a peaceful solution borne out of diplomacy and negotiation; and have officially banned anti-Turkish demonstrations, while allowing small neighborhood demonstrations. Kurds keep pointing to ceasefire announcements, overestimating the good faith derived from such pronouncements, particularly when they fall short of a call to the PKK to lay down its arms. When confronted with press reports about the PKK's ability to operate and garner support in northern Iraq, the KRG is hard-pressed to offer specific actions it could take to counter the group and

quickly reverts to discussions about long-term solutions.
(Note: We understand a committee chaired by PM Barzani including key several security officials met on October 31 and is developing specific measures to cut off the PKK's ability to move and re-supply in northern Iraq.)

WHAT COULD HELP BRING THE KRG AROUND

17. (S) COMMENT: The KRG wants legitimacy and respect and has repeatedly called for dialogue. The view among Kurds is that if Turkey is serious about engaging Iraqi leaders on the issue, it must be prepared to talk to the KRG as a constitutionally-empowered entity. Expecting official and public GOT recognition of the KRG as a regional Iraqi entity would, of course, be a redline for Turkey -- but a statement before any new negotiations indicating that the GOT respected Iraq's constitution arrangements and accepting KRG participation in Iraqi delegations would be helpful in reassuring the KRG that Turkey's aim is to stop PKK attacks.

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